

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Oct 21st 2012

One day a middle aged man went to meet a doctor. He was getting agitated because the doctor had delayed him. Noticing that the man is disturbed, the doctor asked him, do you have another appointment today? The man said my wife is waiting for me. The doctor asked, “Will she get angry if you reach late?” The man replied “no she will not”.

“Are you to take lunch together at exact time?” asked the doctor. The man continued, “No, she doesn’t know anything. Even she does not recognize me as she has Alzheimer’s disease”. “Then why do you rush to the house?” asked the doctor. The man replied, ‘I recognize her and she is my wife’. Here we see a committed husband who does not look at what he is going to get back in return for his help or will he be recognized by somebody.

Often we are challenged to look for power position and recognition in this world. Many a times we hear of people who throw away the values of the Gospel and fraternal living and go after power. Not only the poor and the needy that look for it but also the rich and the powerful are craving for it and as a result in the world there is corruption, injustices, violence etc.

In many parts of the Gospel we read about the teachings of Jesus on humility, service etc. For example, be like little children; the son of man has come to serve and not to be served; washing the feet of the disciples at the Last Supper (like a slave) with an invitation to do the same; one who wants to be the first of all must be the servant of all etc. Why is it that Jesus teaches many times on the same topic? It may not have been so necessary if there was no problem at all. So I have a feeling that there might have been some sort of problem in the company of the disciples. 12 disciples of Jesus were from different backgrounds and temperaments and so Jesus teaches again and again on humility, service, and leadership. Jesus has just finished saying about his sufferings but the two disciples are thinking of where they are going to sit in the kingdom of Jesus.

The aspirations and the desires of sons of Zebedee is just contrary to the teachings of Jesus on the Last supper. As I said the symbol of washing the feet is a powerful symbol of service. All through his life he taught his disciples and us to be simple and at the Last Supper he gave the example with his own life. In the Gospel we see the other disciples are angry with the two for asking this and not because the time of asking was wrong. Perhaps they are jealous of these two disciples who have asked for this request before themselves.

For many of us, the story of James and John is disconcerting because if James and John, who knew Jesus personally, couldn’t incorporate his teachings into their lives, how on earth are we to do so? Or what are the ways in which we can check if our actions are based on service or power? One way is by making sure that the motivation for our service is love. Eighteenth-century Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Secker said, “God has three sorts of servants in the world: some are slaves, and serve Him from fear; others are hirelings, and serve for wages; and the last are sons [and daughters], who serve because they love.”

Another way to become better servants is by being mindful of who it is that calls us to serve. We

should remember that in all things we serve God and God alone. If we have a wrong understanding of who has called us to service then there is every possibility that we may forget the purpose of our service. Yet another way to become better servants is by ensuring that our church is a “servant church.” We are all called to do service in different roles and nobody can escape from it or nobody can say I do not need a service form others.

The story of James and John is disconcerting because even the most pious listeners can see a bit of themselves in the story. How many of us are able to truly base our lives and actions on the divine definition of greatness – ‘servant hood’?

The success of the Kingdom of God does not consist in prestige and power, but in the following the way of Jesus, our leader and master. In each of us there is a part of James and John and let us ask the Lord who gave us the example of service with his own life, to help us in following him, in serving him and his people.

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